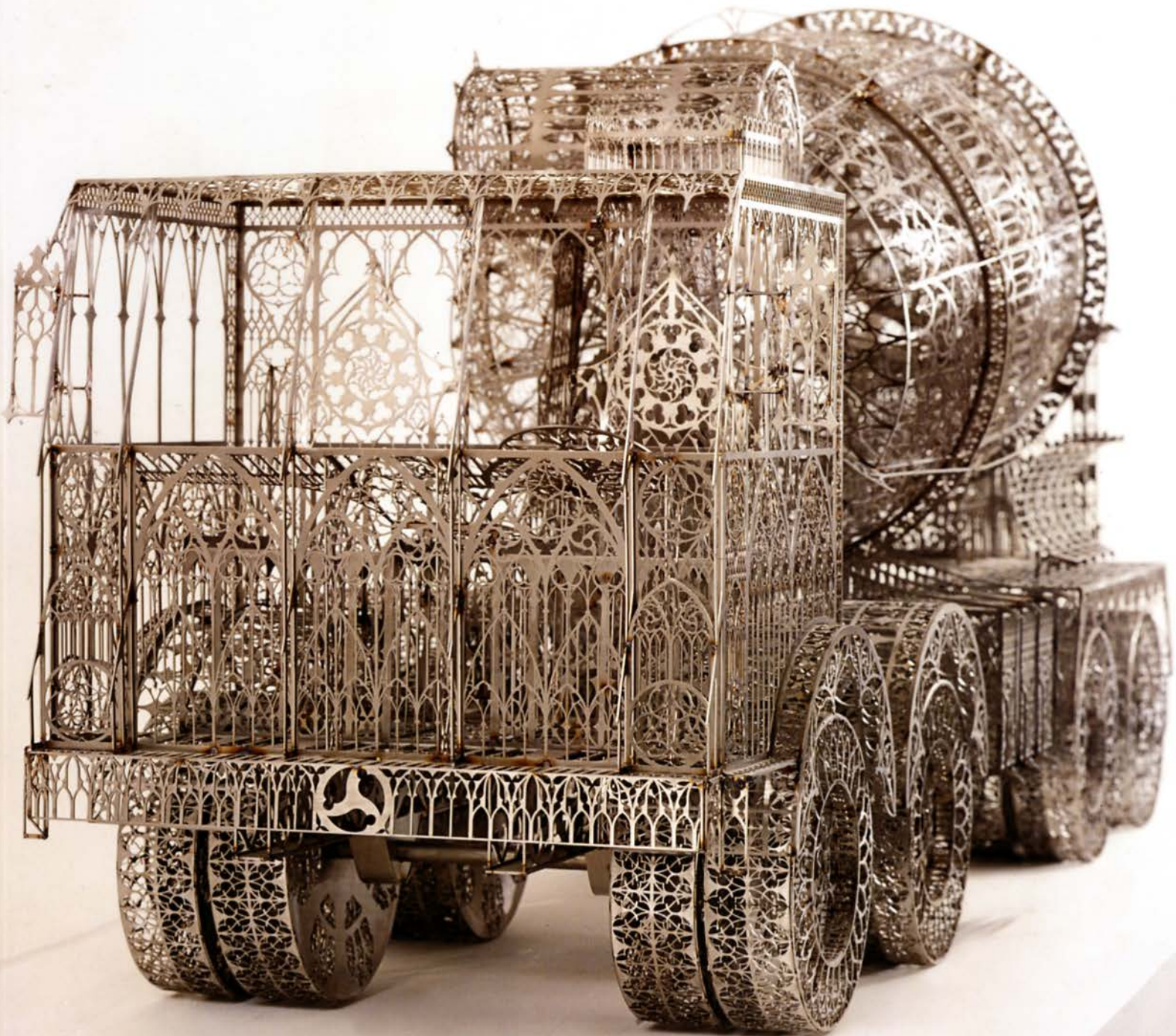


BORDERCROSSINGS

A MAGAZINE OF THE ARTS



STRANGE
BEAUTY

Wim Delvoye
Guy Maddin
Erwin Redl
Steven Shearer

Art Green
Neil Farber
Lee Henderson





top left and centre: Sophie Jodoin, *Diary of K, a journal of drawings*, 2005, oil on mylar, 32 x 24"; detail on left, full work on right.

top right and centre: Sophie Jodoin, *Diary of K, a journal of drawings*, 2005, oil on mylar, 32 x 24"; full work top right, detail centre right.

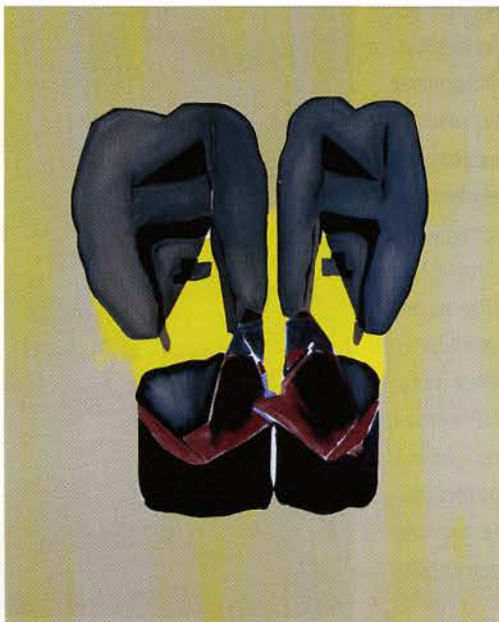
lower left: Matthew Brown, *Untitled, August 2004*, oil and acrylic on canvas, 42 x 52". All images courtesy the artist.

Jodoin is aware that her portraits hold a mirror up to the viewer as much as they are reflections of what the subject looks like. "People who see these as grotesque are people who are not very comfortable with themselves." In doing the drawings of her mother, the artist was herself subject to a certain degree of discomfort. "It was disturbing at first, especially because I was doing the drawings of my mother and she was posing in the nude. It was like looking at myself in the mirror in 20 years. Ultimately both these bodies of work were self-portraits, because I was projecting on myself how these people go through life. With Karine I thought of her strength and difficulties."

What comes through Jodoin's act of psychological portraiture is her respect for the dignity of her subjects. Even though her mother is nude, there are no full portraits with details of sagging flesh. "They were busts," she says. "I thought of them as Etruscan sculptures." With Karine she focussed on her qualities of endurance and survival, and she carefully considered the size of the figure, avoiding both large and miniature scales, since either could easily

have shifted towards satire or caricature. Jodoin's work drifts in an opposite direction. "I would like to challenge the viewer in the same way that prayers or poetry do. They're very low-key, quiet things and because of that, they require a little bit more time and concentration." ■

"Diary of K; a journal of drawings" was on exhibition at the Edward Day Gallery in Toronto from September 8 to October 2, and at Newzones Gallery in Calgary from October 22 to November 26, 2005.



Enclosed Encounters of a Strange Kind

Matthew Brown likes to take the viewer into unfamiliar territory. The Vancouver-based artist and member of the collaborative drawing group The Lions conjures up "uncanny," an old Surrealist term, when he talks about his work. "I'm using it to give a sense of familiarity. The image refers to something that doesn't exist but it seems like it does." Brown was especially taken by an exhibition of imaginary portraits Janet Werner exhibited at the Contemporary Art Gallery in Vancouver in 1998. "Even though they were invented, I thought they were people I knew."

Since then, he has found a way to come up with his own imaginary portraits. Brown has a cache of what he



calls "drunken drawings," works that aren't good enough to stand alone but that are good enough to feed into the computer as the raw material for painting ideas. He scans the drawings into his computer and subjects them to the same transformative programs. "It gives me a brand new form and most of the time you're not able to see the similarities between the line drawing and the thing the computer made. It's bizarre, like the scene in *The Fly* where he goes in with the fly and what comes out is something totally different."

The curious thing about these drawings is the range of associations they provoke; they can resemble generic insects, automated anime or, in the strangest coincidence of all, West Coast Native designs. "I really don't know what to think of that similarity. They're usually very beautiful abstract



forms, often with a decorative element that makes them seem kind of baroque."

Brown admits that he tends to "anthropomorphize everything." In addition to paintings that seem like abstractions, he also makes works that include figures in strange landscapes. While viewers may regard them as curious combinations of the recognizable and the unfamiliar, Brown tends to see them in a unifying light. "In some of the figure paintings, there are objects that people think are noise or abstract marks. But to me they're always some sort of representation of an object."

Brown's choices for his representational paintings are intriguing. All the figures (which sometimes put you in mind of Marlene Dumas; at other times, Eric Fischl) are male nudes. "I thought that using the male was easier than using the female nude because it's got much less baggage. I wasn't thinking of sexuality at all, and I wasn't interested in getting into the history of the male gaze." What he does get into is a new history, a purposeful dissonance in which nothing, from the colour to the form, is obvious. He ends up being the youthful *paterfamilias* of the strange. ■

Matthew Brown will have an exhibition at the Khyber Centre for the Arts, Halifax, Nova Scotia, in February 2006.

top left: Matthew Brown, *Untitled*, March 2005, oil and acrylic on canvas, 60 x 66".

top right: Matthew Brown, *Untitled*, August 2004, oil and acrylic on canvas, 84 x 72".

lower left: Matthew Brown, *Untitled*, March 2005, oil and acrylic on canvas, 60 x 66".